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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000594

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER

P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY

USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER

NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON

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OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: JUMBLATT TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAY 2008 CLASHES

REF: BEIRUT 585

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶1. (C) On a popular political talk show televised live May 28, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt called on March 14 leader Saad Hariri to seek only the truth, and not justice, from the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, believing that justice that incriminates Hizballah could spark "internal sedition"; i.e., Sunni-Shia tensions. In an overture to Hizballah, Jumblatt took partial responsibility for the two decisions by the March 14-led government on Hizballah's telecommunications network that led to the May 2008 clashes. This could pave the way for a Nasrallah-Jumblatt meeting, now expected immediately after the elections. Jumblatt called for more sophisticated weaponry for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and criticized the United States for not sufficiently arming the LAF. End summary and comment.

NEED TRUTH, NOT
JUSTICE, FROM STL

¶2. (SBU) Druze leader Walid Jumblatt appeared on a May 28 televised interview with journalist Marcel Ghanem. He called the recent "Der Spiegel" article alleging Hizballah's involvement in the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri (reftel), a "nuclear bomb." He postulated that the Israelis were behind the article to "sow Sunni-Shia tensions", saying, "We all know about this paper's affiliation with Israel."

¶3. (SBU) He called on March 14 leader Saad Hariri to "simply find satisfaction in the truth alone (rather than seek justice) if the court decision were to cause internal sedition" and stressed that the interest of the country is more important than the court ruling. Bizarrely blaming the international community, he said that UN Security Council Resolution 1559 "killed Hariri," implying that the resolution calling for no foreign interference in Lebanon led to Hariri's death.

TAKES RESPONSIBILITY
FOR MAY 2008 CLASHES

¶4. (SBU) Jumblatt also took responsibility for the two government decisions regarding Hizballah's telecommunication network that led to violence in May, 2008. "Despite the warnings of the LAF director of intelligence, I pushed to adopt these two decisions out of nervousness and because we were under severe tension and assassinations," he said. However, he blamed "some" individuals for delaying the retraction of these two decisions during a cabinet meeting held one week after the May 7 clashes.

¶5. (SBU) Hedging his bets on the parliamentary elections' outcome, he said, "We all made mistakes especially when we labeled Hizballah pro-Syrian and Iranian and when it labeled us as traitors." Jumblatt cautioned that Hizballah's weapons could prompt other parties to ask for weapons, drawing an analogy between the PLO acquiring weapons in the 1970s, which contributed to Christian militias arming themselves.

SUGGESTS HIZBALLAH SHOULD SUPPORT THE LEBANESE STATE

¶6. (SBU) Jumblatt said there was no longer consensus on the role of Hizballah as a resistance because the "mutual bickering submerged them (Hizballah) in the Lebanese mud." He reiterated his call on Hizballah to support the state because "it will be your best protection." Jumblatt asked rhetorically, "Who will protect you from that Lebanese mud? Is it better for you to be singled out as a party and sect by Israel or have the Lebanese unanimously vote to protect you?"

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¶7. (SBU) Jumblatt requested Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah to "help us in order to prevent Lebanon from being a battlefield because it appears that Israel, the United States, and Syria do not want Lebanese sovereignty." Calling it a vicious cycle, Jumblatt complained that the army is weak because the "U.S. and Iran do not give the army equipment to perform its duties properly," yet Hizballah will not disarm before having a strong army. He thanked Vice President Biden for the military equipment he gave Lebanon during his visit to Lebanon, but added that he wanted more sophisticated weaponry for the LAF.

¶8. (SBU) Criticizing the U.S. without naming it, he said, "Some countries wanted us to confront Hizballah while at the same time, they are engaging with Iran and Syria over issues of interest for them, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan." On elections, Jumblatt warned of negative economic consequences if March 8 wins because the West might impose sanctions on Lebanese banks.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Jumblatt disclosed to fellow March 14 leaders on May 26 that he planned to take responsibility for setting in motion the May 2008 events, a move that was rejected by his coalition partners. We view this overture to Hizballah as yet another step taken by Jumblatt to plant one foot firmly in each camp to protect himself and the Druze community after the June 7 parliamentary elections. Jumblatt's apology for May 2008 could be the final step to pave the way for a Nasrallah-Jumblatt meeting, now expected immediately after the elections. End comment.

SISON